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NRC TO HOLD PUBLIC MEETING TO DESCRIBE NEW NRC INSPECTION PROGRAM FOR COOPER NUCLEAR STATION

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet with the public June 22 to describe a new pilot inspection and assessment program being conducted at Cooper Nuclear Station, a nuclear power plant near Brownville, Nebraska.

The meeting will be at 7 p.m. at Arbor Manor, 1617 Central Ave., Auburn, Nebraska. The meeting will include a description of the new program and an opportunity for questions and comments from the public.

Cooper is one of nine plants participating in the pilot program, which began June 1, to test and adjust the new inspection and assessment process. Following the six-month trial, the program is expected to be extended to all 103 commercial nuclear power reactors next year.

The NRC has developed the new reactor inspection and assessment program to more effectively and efficiently use its resources. Changes in the inspection and assessment effort are necessary to keep pace with improvements in nuclear power plant safety performance over the past 20 years. Plants that perform well will have less regulatory oversight than plants that have problems.

A "baseline" inspection program will continue for all nuclear plants with NRC resident inspectors on site supplemented by specialists from one of four NRC regional offices. If performance declines at a plant, the NRC will step up its regulatory activities for that plant.

The new assessment program will focus in part on performance indicators. These indicators are objective, statistically-based parameters that indicate how safely plants are performing. In addition, NRC inspectors will monitor a number of plant activities that are not measured by the indicators. The inspections will pay particular attention to how well the plant staff finds and fixes problems that affect safety.

The pilot inspection and assessment program began June 1 at nine power plant sites -- Hope Creek and Salem in New Jersey, FitzPatrick in New York, Prairie Island in Minnesota, Quad Cities in Illinois, Shearon Harris in North Carolina, Sequoyah in Tennessee, and Fort Calhoun and Cooper in Nebraska.

A more complete description of the new inspection and oversight program is available on the NRC's internet web site at: <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA/primer.htm>. Questions may also be addressed to opa@nrc.gov.

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